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NEW GATE

OF CONNECTICUT:

1220

A HISTORY OF THE PRISON,

ITS

INSURRECTIONS, MASSACRES, &c.

IMPRISONMENT OF THE

T O R T U R E S ,

In the Revolution.

THE ANCIENT AND RECENT WORKING OF

Its MINES, &c.,

TO WHICH IS APPENDED A DESCRIPTION OF THE

STATE PRISON,

AT WETHERSFIELD.

By RICHARD H. PHELPS,
EAST GRANBY, CONN.

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NEWGATE AND STATE PRISON.

THE main design of the following has been to collect and embody facts relating to *Newgate*, the former prison of the State of Connecticut. There are many circumstances respecting the Mines, and also while it was kept as a prison which are interesting, to those at least, who like the writer, reside in its vicinity, and who have noticed many of its scenes; and judging from the numbers who travel far to explore its caverns and the works which now cover its grounds, it will continue long to be an object of interest and examination—time will wear slowly upon its strength, and age will but add to its interest. Many inquiries are also made about it of those living near it when they travel abroad, and when it is known that they are familiar with its history. When Dr. Franklin resided in Philadelphia, having occasion to travel to Boston, and knowing the gift of many of the Yankees in asking questions, in order to satisfy their importunity and save time in his answers, he adopted the expedient of printing a number of cards, stating that he resided in Philadelphia, was a printer by trade, and on his way to Boston; these he gave to his questioners whenever they commenced their attacks upon him. This account, if it serves no general use, may at least, serve to answer many important questions.

It is useful to record events in their day before they are forgotten, or are handed down as tales and traditions. If a record of the events connected with some of the monuments, castles and fortresses in Europe, or ruins in Central America, could now be obtained, it would be of vast interest to antiquarians, and would greatly assist historians to substantiate valuable history.

When the aged in this vicinity are gone, and that soon must be, this prison fortress will doubtless remain; the traveller then will ask — Who built these towers? Why these huge grates, these trenches and these walls? How came these spacious caverns to be dug out of solid rocks, and why those rings and those fetters fastened to their massive sides? Surely the echo of these caverns cannot answer, nor the people who lived cotemporaneous with their use. Therefore, sufficient is said as an apology for these hasty sketches. The materials for the work have been gathered from a variety of sources. A part is statistical, from the ancient colonial records — and some is taken from the verbal statements kindly

furnished by the aged now living; much also has been related to the author by the aged who have been for years deceased, and who knew personally of the circumstances and events which are herein recorded, and all may be relied upon as being generally correct.

NEWGATE is the name by which the prison was called in the days of the Revolution, and was so called after Newgate prison in England. Our forefathers, in giving names to many of their towns and cities, also copied from those of their ancestral home, doubtless wishing to make their adopted country wear the familiar aspect of their native land; and in christening this prison after a receptacle of rogues in London, they intended to give to it a prison-like appearance, and to comprehend all of hideous name, gloomy, and terrible!

The prison situated near the centre of Granby, occupies an eminence at the base, and on the western side of the Green-stone mountain, which here rises to an elevation higher than at any other place in the State, giving to the scenery around, an impression of grandeur and sublimity, seldom surpassed. The site of the prison was formerly included within the limits of the town of Simsbury, and so remained until 1786, when a part of the town including the limits of the prison was set off and incorporated under the name of Granby; hence the place was at that time known by the name of *Simsbury Copper Mines, on Copper Hill*. The title to the mines was for a long time disputed in law between individuals, when so early as 1753, the General Court of the Colony appointed a Committee to investigate the subject; who gave a decision which was afterwards confirmed. The first working of these mines bears a far earlier date, as appears by the following:

[“Anno Regni Annae Reginae, V Septimo A. D. 1706.”]—“*An act relating to the Copper Mines at Simsbury.*”

“Whereas, there hath lately been discovered a copper mine at Simsbury which hath been so improved as to give good satisfaction to conclude that a public benefit may arise therefrom: Now, for the better encouraging, directing and enabling the proprietors and undertakers, or others that are or may be concerned therein, their heirs and assigns, to manage, carry on, and improve said mines to the best advantage,” &c.

In 1714, the records show that the use of the mines were purchased by Jonathan Belcher of Boston, (afterwards Governor,) Timothy Woodbridge, Jr. and Wm. Partridge, and in 1721 they had miners from Germany employed, and were expending seventy pounds per month in the work. They were particular in their lease to have it expressly stated, that one fifth of all metals, &c.

which might be procured should go to the *crown* — thus acknowledging themselves most loyal and devoted subjects of taxation and revenue to his Majesty. The laws of the colony permitting slavery, they employed slaves to a considerable extent in working the mines, — owing to the want of capital or of enterprize they did not take sufficient pains in digging drains or levels to let off the water which entered through the crevices of rock, and they resorted to the expedient of pumping it out. Laborers in the vicinity were employed for the purpose, and some of the farmers in the town of Windsor actually were accustomed to ride to the mines, and work at that business in the night, and return to their farms in the morning, and their wages were paid in gold, silver and copper coin. The present extent of the excavations prove that the business was prosecuted with some effect, and that immense quantities of ore have been taken — several stamping mills carried by water were built in neighboring places, and actively employed in pulverizing the ore — furnaces were also constructed for smelting it, and a coin, known by the name of “Higley’s coppers,” made from the ore, used to pass quite current for change.

The rage in the Colony upon the business of mining about that period was very brisk, as it would seem from the following petition copied from the records :

“ *To the Honnell, The Gov’c Councill and Representatives in General Court assembled in New Haven, Oct. 16th, A. D. 1723:* ”

“ The Prayer of Joseph Whitney of New Haven Humbly Sheweth, That your Suppliant hat Expended a Considerable time and money in Searching after Mines, and has made farther Discoveries perhaps than any other man in this Colony has before done, and having met with such incouragement as that I am willing to be at farther Expense in the Same Search — but ready money being so absolutely necessary therein ; I therefore Humbly pray this assembly will be pleased to lease me one thousand pounds of the money Granted last may to be struck, and now to be disposed of by this assembly — upon double security in Lands and Bonds, for the payment of the interest every year ; the principall to be Returned at the Expiration of ten years,” &c.

JOSEPH WHITNEY.”

A great deal of labor and capital without doubt was expended, as the aforesaid petitioner says, “ *in searching after mines*,” and the evidence may be seen in the numerous pits and shafts which have been dug in the whole range of this mountain to New Haven.

At that day, as in all previous time since the world began, and as is seen at the present day, their chief aim appeared to be to make their fortunes by head-work — by speculation, and choosing

rather to spend their time and risk their fortunes in mining and other uncertain projects, rather than to dig upon the *surface of good old mother earth*, for a *sure and honest living*.

The news of mineral wealth had the effect which it generally does upon British cupidity, and in 1760 a company was formed in England for the purpose of prosecuting the business of mining. They dug wells in several places, one of which is eighty feet deep, and sunk a shaft through solid rock to the depth of between thirty and forty feet. Through this shaft they lifted many hundred tons of rock and ore, a large quantity of which was deposited about one mile east of the mountain in Turkey Hills, at a place now marked by an entire dearth of vegetation, owing to the poisonous qualities extracted from the ore. From thence it was taken to Hartford by teams, where it was shipped to New York, and two vessels were freighted with it, and sent to England. These vessels were both lost; one was captured as a prize by the French, being at that time at war with England — the other was unfortunately sunk in the English Channel. These disasters, together with the great labor expended in digging, and the laws of England prohibiting the smelting of it in this country, disheartened the company, and the further prosecution of the work was abandoned.

These caverns were first occupied as a place for the confinement of Tories about the beginning of the American Revolution. What an astonishing train of events followed and how distant from the minds of the British company of miners, the idea that they were actually hewing out prison cells for the lodgment of their friends, the Tories of the United States!

At first the number confined in these caverns did not exceed five or six, but as time developed events, the numbers increased. When the tea was thrown into the sea at Boston in 1773, and that port closed by an act of Parliament, so great was the excitement and so indignant were the people, particularly of Massachusetts and Connecticut, on account of British oppression, that the use of tea and all commodities imported in British vessels and subject to duty, were prohibited. Several persons it is said were confined in the dungeons for the crime of having a small quantity of tea and other articles of British import in their possession; true the contrast in the times may appear rather curious, for at this day a housekeeper would be judged by common consent, deserving the same punishment for being suspected of *not* keeping them on hand. Our ancestors knew no half-way policy, and seldom adopted dilatory measures to carry their points — tea vessels if then kept at all were kept out of sight — teapots were run into musket balls, and they were the kind of currency with which the people dealt with old England.

Public opinion in some of the colonies against those who favored the mother country was very rigid, authorizing any person even to shoot them if they were found beyond the limits of their own premises; persons now living well remember a tory who was shot in the town of Simsbury. Those who possessed not the hardihood thus summarily to dispatch a neighbor or relative for not choosing to fight for the country, or for purchasing of the British, adopted the more humane expedient of penning them up in the caverns, where they could at least leisurely examine the evidence of British labor, although not allowed the blessed boon of being governed by British laws. We cannot for a moment doubt the noble intentions of the American patriots in the severity of those measures, for the results are now universally acknowledged and are generally appreciated. If at the commencement of their struggle for liberty, they had permitted those emissaries to raise a question as to the right of independent government, and had suffered them to prowl about unmolested, and to spread the fuel of disaffection, a *civil*, instead of a national war, must have followed. The proud eagle of Liberty would not so soon have risen over this land of plenty, and the reveille of English soldiery would have told misfortune's tale, of a government of force.

Most of those confined were persons of character, property and great influence, they being the ones to do harm rather than those who were mere weathercocks in principle, and vacillating in practice. Their first keeper was Capt. John Viets, who resided near by, and who supplied them daily with food and necessaries which were required. At that time there was no guard kept through the day, but two or three sentinels kept watch during the night.

There was an ante-room or passage through which to pass before reaching their cell, and the usual practice of Capt. Viets when he carried their food, was to look through the grates into this passage to observe whether they were near the door, and if not then to enter, lock the door after him, and pass on to the next. The inmates soon learned his custom and accordingly prepared themselves for an escape. When the Capt. came the next time, some of them had contrived to unbar their cell door, and huddled themselves in a corner behind the door in the passage, where they could not easily be seen, and upon his opening it they sprang upon him, threw him down, pulled him in and taking the key from his possession, they locked him up and made good their escape. What were the Captain's reflections on his sudden transition from keeper to that of prisoner, is not stated, but he probably thought with Falstaff, that "discretion would have been the better part of valor," and he must adopt, in future, more cautious measures; his absence was soon discovered by his family, who came to his relief.

The inhabitants around rallied immediately and gave chase to the absconding heroes, and finally succeeded in capturing nearly the whole of them; several were taken in attempting to cross the Tunxis or Farmington river, at Scotland bridge, a few miles south, a guard having been stationed at that place to intercept them. Some Santa Anna-like, took refuge upon trees, and others met with a more certain capture. A respected matron then a child, now states that the news of their escape and capture, spread as much dread or terror among the children in the neighborhood, as if they had been a band of midnight assassins.

The tories confined in the dungeon, often in the course of the war, amused themselves in making poetry in derision of the measures which were carried on by the patriots against England. The following are a part of some rhymes (referring to the patriots) composed by them and sent to their keeper.

"Many of them in halters will swing
Before John Hancock will ever be king."

John Hancock being one of the most ardent friends of the Revolution, was particularly obnoxious to the British, and a price was set on his head; this raised the spirit of the colonies, and they at once made him President of Congress, which drew upon him the special odium of the tories. During their imprisonment they frequently sent to the keeper for provisions and other articles. The following is from the original, now in the possession of the author.

"Mr. Viets,

If you have any *meet* Cooked, you will much oblige me by sending me a dinner, for I suffer for want.

Prison.

PETER SACKETT."

This man was one of the thirty who afterwards were engaged in a bloody contest with the guard, and he made his escape at that time.

For a while previous to the year 1776, the caverns were used in part for the confinement of thieves, burglars and other criminals, and who were kept in the same apartment with the tories.

Permission was given by the authorities to employ them all in working the mines, and a guard generally superintended their work. In the year 1776, they attempted an escape by burning. A level had been opened from the bottom of the mines through the hill westward, for the purpose of draining off the water, and the mouth of this level was chiefly closed by a heavy wooden door firmly fastened. They had by degrees collected sufficient combustibles, and with a piece of stone and steel they kindled a fire against the door, which burned as fast as damp fuel in a damp

dungeon naturally could ; but instead of making their escape from the prison, they all nearly made their final escape from this world, for the dense smoke and blue flame soon filled the apartment and almost suffocated them ; search being made, one of them was found dead, and five others were brought forth senseless but finally recovered. They were afterwards placed in a strong wooden building erected for the purpose above ground. They soon set this building on fire, and burned it to the ground —nearly all escaped, but several were afterwards retaken. The fact is very strange that the people about two years after built another house for the same purpose, and of the *like materials!* The experience from the past would seem to have dictated a different course, and to have forced upon their minds the necessity of adopting more prudent measures for their own safety, and for the security of the prisoners ; they might then have avoided the dreadful scene which was soon to follow—a scene of conflict and blood !

As the war with England now raged with fury, the animosity between the Whigs and Tories had grown in proportion, and the seal of distinct party was in many places stamped with vivid impression, so that at this period the number doomed to the prison had amounted to thirty, and nearly all of them were tories. They were a desperate set of men, and for their greater security a guard was allotted to each one, the thirty guard being armed with loaded muskets and fixed bayonets. On a dark and cloudy night, fire was set to the wooden building by the prisoners within ; the flames spread fast, and quickly made an outlet for them—the alarm was given, and the guard rallied to the spot where they were boldly met by the infuriated insurgents ; many of the muskets were wrenched from the guard and turned upon them.

One of them Mr. Gad Sheldon, was mortally wounded fighting at his post, and six more wounded severely. Says a venerable old lady now living, “it was a dreadful sight to see the wounded guard as they were brought into our house one after another, and laid upon the floor weltering in their blood ! When I came into the room the faithful Sheldon sat on a bench, his body bent forward, and a bayonet dripping with blood lying before him, which he had just drawn out of his breast—it was a deadly stab !” Many of the rebels were wounded,—some of them were assailed and gashed by their own comrades through mistake, while fighting in the darkness of the conflict. Nearly all made their escape, except those who from their wounds were unable to flee. One was taken upon a tree in Turkey Hills, east of the mountain,—a few others were found in swamps and barns in the neighboring towns. The struggles at this prison to subdue toryism, were doubtless greater than at any other place in any of the Colonies.

Few tories were ever afterwards kept there, as the cause of liberty had now become so popular among all classes, that a person seldom could be found imprudent enough to avow publicly, monarchial sentiments.

The premises were afterwards used by the State for the confinement of criminals, and they were kept chiefly at work in making wrought nails. It was not until 1790, that it was established permanently as a State prison. It is said to have been the design to employ the convicts in working the mines, which for a while was practised, but it was soon found that the convicts must necessarily have for that work, precisely the right kind of tools for digging out, and they several times used them for that purpose; this reason with the consequent necessity of keeping so strong a guard both day and night, finally induced them to abandon the employment. In that year, (1790) an act was passed constituting Newgate a permanent prison, and providing for the erection of the necessary buildings.

A wooden palisade, mounted with iron spikes was constructed, enclosing half an acre of ground, within which, work-shops and other buildings were placed, and a deep trench was opened on the western side. (The wooden enclosure remained until 1802, when a strong wall was laid in its place, which is now standing.) A brick building was erected in the centre of the yard for the officers and privates, in the rear part of which a stone apartment was afterwards constructed directly over the mouth of the cavern, and in this room the prisoners were occasionally kept.

Before proceeding further, it may be useful to describe the caverns more particularly as being the prison cells, and also to relate the general management and employments of the prisoners, &c. The passage down the shaft into the caverns, is upon a ladder fastened upon one side, and resting on the bottom. At the foot of this passage commences a gradual descent for a considerable distance, all around being solid massive rock or ore. The passages extend many rods in different directions, some of them even leading under the cellars of the dwellings in the neighborhood. In two of the passages are wells of deep water, one of which measures eighty feet — they serve for a free circulation of air to the inmates of this gloomy place, and were sometimes used for shafts through which to lift the ore, when the business of mining was carried on. On the sides and in the niches of the cavern, rooms were built of boards for the prisoners, in which straw was placed for their beds. The horrid gloom of this dungeon can be realized only by those who pass among its solitary windings. The impenetrable vastness supporting the awful mass above, impending as if ready to crush one to atoms, — the dripping water trickling like tears from its

sides, — the unearthly echoes responding to the voice, all conspire to strike the beholder aghast with amazement and horror! These caverns and their precincts, from their antiquity, and the dramas which have been performed within and around, will long be considered as a classic place. The caverns have generally been extremely favorable to the health and longevity of the occupants, which is supposed to arise from some medical quality in the mineral rock.

A writer upon the subject observes, “From the various windings and other causes, it is not cold there, even in the severest weather; and strange as it may seem, it has been satisfactorily ascertained that the mercury ranged 8 degrees lower in the lodging apartments of the prisoners in the warmest days of summer, than it does in the coldest in the winter. This phenomenon is attributed to the circumstance of the cavities in the rocks being stopped with snow, ice and frost in the winter, which prevents so free a circulation of air as is enjoyed in the summer. On the 18th of January, 1811, at eight o'clock, A. M. the mercury stood in the cavern at 52 degrees; and in open air, as soon after as it was practicable for a person to get up from the cavern, (which could not have exceeded five minutes,) it fell to one degree below 0.” Among the numerous visitants at the prison an accident occurred which would seem very dangerous. Mrs. Christia Griswold of Poquonock, while standing at the mouth of the shaft leading down into the cavern, accidentally stepped off, and fell the whole depth striking on the rocky bottom. The buoyancy of her clothes or some other cause saved her life, though she received injuries from which she never entirely recovered. A prisoner afterwards fell at the same place, fetters and all, without appearing to injure him it is said, in the least.

The following is a relation of some of the Anecdotes, Escapes, and Insurrections, which have occurred at various periods in Newgate prison, which may be relied upon as being in the main, correct.

In November, 1794, a convict by the name of Newel escaped from the prison by digging out. It was the practice at that time to allow the prisoners the choice of lodging in the stone cellar under the guard-room, (generally known by the name of the stone jug,) or of going from thence down into the caverns. During the night a noise below was heard by the guard, and some of them went down among the prisoners to learn the cause, but could discover nothing out of place. In the morning on counting them, as was customary, one was discovered to be missing. It was found that the prisoners, in some unaccountable manner, had contrived

to loosen and pull out one of the large cubic stones on the bottom of the cellar. Through the aperture thus made, they hauled out the earth, pouring it down the shaft, and incredible as it may seem, they dug a hole through gravel, earth and stones, under the floor and wall large enough for a man to crawl out! It appears that when the guard went down among them in the night, the prisoners could hear their arrangements for descending, and instantly replaced the stone and prevented a discovery of their operations. Newell, being a very small man, had succeeded in making his escape first; he was never afterwards retaken.

In the year 1802 the prisoners rose upon the guard. The commander, Col. Thomas Sheldon was then sick, and soon after died; all the officers and guard were sick also, except Mr. Dan Forward, a private. With occasional assistance of people in the neighborhood, the entire charge of the prisoners, at that time amounting to between thirty and forty, devolved upon him. They had heard that many of the officers and privates were sick, and observing that one man performed nearly the whole duty their suspicions were confirmed, and their plot strengthened. It is not certain whether there was a fair understanding among them—if there was, their courage most miserably failed. While they were passing down into their caverns at the close of the day as usual, and when nearly all of them were going down the ladder, those who remained refused to proceed, and began an attack upon Forward who was standing near. He was a robust, stout fellow, over six feet high, and always ready for any contest; and instead of retreating, he returned their compliments, taking one by the neck and another by the heels, and dashing them down into the shaft upon the rest who had now begun to come up. The neighbors hearing a scuffle at the prison ran over to his assistance; but their aid was unnecessary, as Forward had vanquished his foes and turned their course into the dungeon. It is very likely that all could have escaped if Forward had betrayed the least sign of fear, or had resorted to persuasion. At this time a very contagious fever raged at the prison and soon began to spread among the convicts. It was without doubt owing to the filth in and around the prison, and to the want and care and attention to their cleanliness and comfort. The disease was so virulent that in order to arrest its progress, a barn was engaged of Capt. Roswell Phelps, into which they were to be removed—people in the vicinity were employed to take care of the sick and perform the duties of guard; but all the prisoners except three Irishmen being sick, it was found impracticable to remove them, and after some weeks the disease abated. None of the prisoners, however, died, and no other instance of a general contagion among them ever afterwards occurred.

In 1806, on the 1st of November, a rebellion occurred which for its results deserves notice. About thirty prisoners in the nail shop had procured keys made from the pewter buttons on their clothes, and with those keys they were to unlock their fetters. It was agreed that one of their number should strike a shovel across a chimney, and that was to be the signal for them all to unlock fetters, and commence an attack upon the guard, to wrest their weapons from them and use them to the best advantage. The signal was given — their fetters were unlocked, and two of their number began the attack. Aaron Goomer, a negro, and another, seized an officer by name of Smith, who not having time to draw his sword struck upon them with scabbard and all, and while the scuffle was going on, a guard named Roe, ran to the spot with his musket, and levelling it at Goomer, shot him dead on the spot — two balls passed through his head — his hair was singed, and his brains scattered around the shop. His comrade seeing his fate, returned to his post. The courage of the rest "oozed out at their fingers ends," for not one of them dared to stir from their places, although their shackles were unfastened. Had a well concerted attack been made and sustained by the rebels at this moment, they would have commanded the prison in five minutes, and could have put to death every officer and private in their quarters.

Three brothers by the name of Barnes, natives of North Haven, were imprisoned together for the crime of burglary, in 1803. These were the most active and the finest looking men in the prison. They were very ingenious and adroit, and would construct almost any mechanism required of them — these were the fellows who planned the insurrection before spoken of, and they made the pewter keys for unlocking the fetters. They were experienced in making keys, and could once, it is said, open any store in New Haven; but their ingenuity at length brought them to an unfortunate place.

The fact is surprising that the same three committed the same offence again, and were convicted and imprisoned again just three years after! These brothers were regarded by the officers as extremely dangerous, and for various offences in the prison, they were kept bound with two sets of fetters during the day, and also chained to the block, besides being sometimes chained by their necks to a beam over head, and at night they were put into the dungeons and their feet made fast in stocks.

One of the convicts named Parker, had been famous for counterfeiting the character of *priest*. He had been known to have many violent attacks of pretended piety, generally appropriating

to himself the name and office of an unordained minister — a part which he managed with a great deal of dexterity, and commonly without suspicion on the part of his “dear hearers” that he was an imposter. His exhortations had been terrible to all *stoney hearts*, and where his preaching lacked mental light or logic, he always had ready supply of bombast and bodily contortions.

Another game it is said he performed to admiration. When he could hear of the absence of a long lost friend in a family, he would appear and claim the identical relationship himself, and act all the tragedy or romantic pathos of a joyful return.

In one instance he claimed to be the husband of a disconsolate widow, and was received by her with all the attachment supposable at such a happy reunion. How long her paramour managed to cajole her is not certainly stated, but he doubtless appropriated to his own condition the sentiment that “absence tightens the chords which unite *friends and lovers*.”

How astonishing such adroitness! to be preacher and “steal the livery of Heaven to serve the devil in”—to be brother, son, or husband, and appearing more natural so to speak, in a fictitious garb, than in his real character. When his term of service expired, and as he was passing out of the prison gate, one of the convicts exclaimed “wo to the inhabitants of the earth, for the devil has gone out among them.”

Prince Mortimer, a prisoner lived to a very advanced age. He died at the prison in Wethersfield, in 1834, supposed to be 110 years old; he commonly went by the name of *Guinea*, which was probably given to him on account of his native country. His complexion did not in the least belie his name, for surely he was the personification of “darkness visible.” His life was a tale of misfortunes, and his fate won the commiseration of all who knew him. He was captured on the coast of Guinea by a slaver when a boy — was transported in a filthy slave ship to Connecticut, then a slave colony, and was sold to one of the Mortimer family in Middletown. He was a servant to different officers in the Revolutionary war — had been sent on errands by General Washington, and said he had “straddled many a cannon when fired by the Americans at the British troops.” For the alledged crime of poisoning his master he was doomed to Newgate prison in 1811 for life. He appeared a harmless, clever old man, and as his age and infirmities rendered him a burden to the keepers, they frequently tried to induce him to quit the prison. Once he took his departure, and after rambling around in search of some one he formerly knew, like the aged prisoner released from the Bastile, he returned to the gates of the prison, and begged to be re-admitted to his dungeon home, and in prison ended his unhappy years!

A convict, by the name of Newman, was a noted prison breaker. Although he perhaps could not boast of unlocking, sealing, and digging out of so many prisons as the famous Stephen Burrows, yet his character, as it was written, compared very well. He escaped in various ways from several prisons in Canada and the United States, but this one he said, "was the hardest and most secure prison he ever entered." However, he contrived several plans for escaping; once he feigned himself to be dead. He was accordingly laid out as a corpse, and preparations made for his interment; but before finding his carcase firmly under ground, he concluded it best to have his resurrection, and at length ventured to disclose to his attendants the important fact, that he would feel quite as comfortable in his long home if he could only get the breath out of his body and make his heart stop beating. He often pretended to have fits, requiring medical aid, and what was of more consequence, the aid of a little *Brandy* or *Madeira*. He was finally cured of these tricks with the threat of having the brand of *Rogue* set on his forehead.

It was frequently customary for farmers and others in the neighborhood to employ the prisoners in their fields, being accompanied at such times by some of the guard. They also performed a great amount of labor in quarrying stone for the prison buildings and other uses. Six of them on one occasion were sent out a short distance to quarry stone, in charge of one officer and two privates. With no fetters, and a fair field before them, they perceived the chance a good one for escape. Their plan was to get their keepers near together—to employ their attention about some trifles and quickly seize their arms. Accordingly they persuaded their keepers to peel off some birch bark and make some caps for them, and while the cap business was going on, and the attention of the *cap makers* was occupied in their vocation, their weapons were seized in an instant—the refugees dividing the spoils and forming themselves into squads, quickly scampered over the hills. The forlorn guards retreated to the prison—told their sad tale to the Captain, and at once received their discharge. The prisoners were all retaken—some in the western part of the State for stealing; the others stole a boat in Connecticut river, and steering down the stream leisurely, were captured in East Hartford meadows.

The wit of some of the convicts is well illustrated in an anecdote of one of them, an Irishman, named Dublin. He was at his work making nails, when at one time Maj. Humphrey who then commanded came along, and says to him, "Dublin, your nails are defective—the heads are not made alike." "Ah," said he, "Major, if our heads had all been made alike, faith, I should not have been caught here."

In the spring of 1822, there was an insurrection of a very serious character. In the fall before between thirty and forty criminals were added to the number in the prison, and this reinforcement was composed principally of the roughest and hardest characters. Their terms of sentence were mostly long which served to fire them with desperation. The same fall a plot was set on foot by them for an outbreak, but it was discovered and defeated. The next spring they perfected their plans of operation in a most masterly manner. The insurgents comprised the whole number in the prison amounting to 130. Their force was stronger than ever before, and the number of guard less, being at the time only 17. The captain (Tuller) was absent through the night, also one sergeant, one private, and the cook. The intention of the rebels was rise in all the shops, *en masse*, at a given signal to knock down the officers, take their weapons, and get possession of the guard house where the arms were kept, and then to take the sole command of the works. The signal was given in the nail shop by a blow from a shovel, and officer Roe was instantly knocked down senseless with a bar of iron—they seized his cutlass and then attacked a guard, but so many being engaged upon him at once, pulling different ways, that they did not succeed in getting his musket. Officer Case in the meantime stationed a sentinel, at the door of the guard-room, with a loaded musket and bayonet charged, which being noticed by the prisoners in the other shops, prevented their advancing to the attack, and seemed to dishearten them at once. The bold rebels in the nail shop kept up the struggle, and sledges, spikes, and other missiles flew in all directions, and confusion and uproar reigned throughout. At this critical moment officer Griswold arrived at the prison, and proceeded directly to the scuffle at the musket—he drew his pistol, fired upon and wounded a prisoner. Roe by this time had come to his senses; he arose from the ground and shot another, when presently several guard presented their cocked muskets, which immediately quelled the assailants. The general cry of the prisoners was now for quarters—“Spare us!—don’t kill us!—don’t kill us!”. The captain soon after arrived and bound the ringleaders in double irons.

Ephraim Shaylor, one of the guard, was sent out to accompany two prisoners, an Indian and a white man, about $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles from the prison where they were employed in reaping. At the close of the day, on their return, the prisoners requested permission to gather some apples and carry them home, to which Shaylor consented; he also was engaged in picking them up when they sprang upon his back, crushed him down, and secured his weapons—a cutlass and fowling piece. One of them took a large stone and

was about to smash out his brains, but the other dissented, and they concluded best to take him to a copse of bushes near by and there dispatch him. One followed at his back holding him by his sword belt with cutlass in hand, and the other marched at a respectable distance, with musket charged in true military style, and onward they marched towards the fatal spot. Our hero now concluded that his final hour had come, and thought if he must die, there might be at least a *choice in the mode*; and considering that a shot in the *back* at such a crisis would be no dishonor, on a sudden he slipped the belt over his head and made for the prison, while the victors were disputing between themselves which should take the musket and fire upon him,—Shaylor reached the prison in safety, rallied several others and pursued them, but they were not to be found.

After their victory, it appears that the Indian proposed to the white man to break each others fetters, to which the other agreed, and after those of the Indian were broken, the crafty liar took speedy leave of his comrade without reciprocating the favor, thus proving that the old adage in this instance is not true, “there is honor among rogues.” The white man secreted himself in the mountains through the day, and at night went to a blacksmith’s shop in Suffield, and with a chisel cut off his fetters. Both were afterwards taken for crime and recommitted to Newgate, where their condition and that of their enemy as victor and vanquished was strangely reversed, and Shaylor had an opportunity of enjoying his right of laying upon their bare backs, a few keen lashes.

Mr. Shaylor afterwards held a commission in the army, was engaged in the battle of Bridgewater, and was wounded—he now draws a pension and is a respected citizen of Green Bay, Mich.

A Thief by name of James Smith, a native of Groton, Conn., was imprisoned for horse-stealing, in 1822, for the term of six years. He had been a great counterfeiter, and circumstances which have recently come to light are evidence that he had been a *barbarous Pirate*. The piratical crew had sailed in a French vessel, and after obtaining much plunder, fearing to enter any port without regular papers, they sunk their vessel on the coast of North Carolina, carried their specie in three boats and buried it all except one large trunk full, on the beach in Currituck County. In corroboration of the above it appears that while he was a prisoner in Newgate, he offered David Foster, a guard, \$200 if he would assist him to escape, telling him he had a great quantity of specie buried on the coast of North Carolina. Foster refused but promised to say nothing about it—this he testified in court when afterwards called upon as a witness. Smith in a few months afterwards escaped from prison, and as was supposed, by bribery.

The following respecting him is related by Mr. Benjamin Taylor a planter now living in North Carolina — Smith and seven or eight others came to his house in the year 1822, and hired of him a room; they employed him with four of his slaves to cross Currituck Sound, and obtained a large trunk, very heavy, and returned to his house where they all remained about one week. While there he saw them divide a large sum of specie among themselves, and Smith appearing to be at their head took the largest sum — they were arrested on suspicion of being robbers, but for want of sufficient evidence discharged. They all then left for Norfolk, Va., except Smith, who remained several weeks, — during this time he appeared at times deranged, would talk to himself, and told the servants that he "had made many a man walk the plank overboard." He then went to the north and was imprisoned at Newgate for stealing a horse. After his escape from prison as above stated, he returned to the house of Mr. Taylor and staid about one week — while there he employed several men in digging on the beach. Their search was fruitless, for the storms and waves had dashed upon the beach too long, and it is supposed swept the treasures into the ocean. He then went away to some place unknown to Mr. Taylor. It now appears from the prison records, that he came to Connecticut where he was taken and again sentenced for twenty-three years on *four* indictments for horse-stealing. His last home on earth was the prison, and there he died in 1836.

The last tragedy developed at Newgate, took place on the night previous to the removal to Wethersfield. Abel N. Starkey an ingenious criminal was the victim. He was a native of Roxbury, Mass. — was committed in 1824 for 20 years, for the crime of making counterfeit money. By his ingenuity and industry at the prison he had amassed \$100 in cash. On the night of September 28th, 1827, he requested permission to lodge in the dungeon, which was granted to him. From some cause which has never been explained, the hatch which covered one of the wells communicating with the cavern, was unfastened. During the night he laid hold of the well rope and ascended upon it part of the way up, when it broke and precipitated him into the water and a bucket fell upon his head, the noise was heard above, and he was found dead. His feet were tied together with a handkerchief for the purpose, as is supposed of assisting him in climbing the rope. Only \$50 were found in his possession; the balance was probably the price paid for unfastening the hatch.

It would seem that Newgate prison in the course of its duration, had contained all which was various in character, determined in

crime and deep in degradation. It compassed all ages from boyhood to extreme old age; both sexes, colors, and different occupations—students from college, and others unable to read or write. Those skilled in Phrenology might have had a rich treat in exploring the bumps on some of those hard heads, and the solving of their characteristics would have afforded amusement and perhaps instruction.

Seriously, it is difficult to account for the wayward inclination of some of them, especially those who were imprisoned a number of times and for the same kind of offence each term, unless it can be accounted for on phrenological principles. It may be said to indicate only a depraved heart, but a depraved heart must have a strange kind of head to run repeatedly into the same crime and get back to the same prison. But I leave it to those who understand the science to defend the ground, presuming that the truth of their cause will insure them a triumphant issue.

When the number and difference of characters kept in that prison is considered, and the treatment which they received is appreciated, it will at once be seen how unavailing the system must have been for their security or their reformation. The custom of fastening their feet to bars of iron to which chains were attached from their necks, chaining them to the block, and likewise to a beam above, while at their work, scourging their bodies like beasts, &c. taught them to look upon themselves in a measure as they were looked upon by others, objects of dread and possessing characters more like fiends than men. With such treatment, reformation must have been, and was entirely out of the question. The system was very well suited to make men into devils, but it could never make devils into men. Instead of putting them in cells separate at night where they might have opportunity for reflection, they were suffered to congregate together, good and bad, young and old, to brew mischief, and to teach new vices to those unpractised. Their midnight revels as may be supposed, were often like the howling in a pandemonium of tigers, banishing sleep and forbidding rest.

It is not desired that these remarks, however, should be construed as imputing blame to the officers or guard of the prison—far from it. Although they were many times in fault, still as the prison was constructed, and in the way that service was required of them, it was impossible to preserve that degree of order and discipline so essential to success. They had no approved system of prison discipline to study, no correct views of punishment connected with reformation were at that day generally known, and but few branches of business were thought of, which would yield a fair compensation and save the State from cost.

The old prison buildings, with five acres of land, were sold to

a company in New York, for \$1200 dollars—a sum probably far below their real value. A few years since, this company again commenced working the mines. They expended many thousands of dollars in beginning extensive levels, building furnaces, and in a steam engine to facilitate their operations. They also raised a considerable quantity of ore, some of which they smelted at their works, and some was sent to England. But owing to a reverse in business affairs and to the want of skill in those employed, the business was for the time again abandoned. One thing is quite certain—the work has been carried on by a variety of labor, by slaves, by free labor, by private individuals, and by chartered companies—and which of the kinds has succeeded best is left to the operators to decide. Too much time and money have now been expended in those mines to justify their abandonment, and it is hoped that a thorough trial will yet be made by those who are not deficient in capital and energy, upon their productiveness, and the question forever settled as to their intrinsic value.

The present State Prison, of Connecticut, situated on the margin of a beautiful cove in the town of Wethersfield, is considered by all as a penitentiary of the *first order*. Its location, its construction, its management and discipline have won the admiration of every State in the Union. It has proved to the world, that criminal punishment can be made a safeguard to society, a reward to the honesty and industry of a people, and also a benefit to the moral and physical condition of the criminals. The prison limits comprise about one acre of ground, which is enclosed by a wall of hard sand stone, 18 feet high, 3 feet thick at its base, and inclining to $1\frac{1}{3}$ feet at the top. Within, and adjoining this wall, are buildings of the same material, for work-shops and cells. In the yard is a cistern under ground, containing 100 hogsheads of water, and a fire engine is attached to the premises. A steam engine of 20 horse power, is connected with the shops for propelling machinery necessary to carry on the various branches of business. In one apartment is a place where the convicts are allowed to bathe at suitable seasons of the year. A portion of the cell building is whitewashed each day, which purifies the air, and gives to the lodging apartments an appearance of neatness; each one enjoys that *blessing of punishment, a separate cell at night*, and no one is allowed through the day to look at any visitor, or to catch the eye of his fellow, but all are intent on the business before them. The whole cost of the establishment, including 17 acres of land, and including all the improvements to the present time, is \$56,908 36.

The number of male convicts, April 1st, 1844, was	170
“ female, “ “	22
Total,	192

The males are employed in making and finishing Chairs, Table Cutlery, Rules and Shoes.

The females in making Chair-seats, reeling Silk, Cooking and Washing, and Mending Clothes.

Daily routine of duty performed at the Connecticut State Prison by its officers.

At daylight the bell is rung for the officers, who immediately repair to the guard-room. When it is sufficiently light, the Deputy Warden gives the signal for manning the walls, and the Overseers take their keys, go to their several divisions, and again wait the signal, when they unlock, and march their men, with the lock step, to their respective shops. The convicts immediately commence work, and also begin at a given point in the shop to wash, which each man does in regular order before the breakfast hour.

At 7 o'clock the bell is rung for breakfast, the convicts stop work, form into a line in their shops, and wait the signal of the bell, when they are marched into the prison yard, and form a line in front of their buckets. At the word *right*, each man turns to the right; the word *up* is given, and each man takes his bucket upon his left arm, when they form into sections in close order, as marched from the shops; and at the word *forward*, they march in the same manner to the hall, where they are seated to hear the reading of the Bible and attend prayers. From thence they are marched around the cells, take their kids containing their breakfast as they pass the kitchen, and are immediately locked up. Each officer then reports the number of men in his charge to the deputy Warden, who, finding it right, gives the signal of "all's well;" the Watchmen leave the wall and repair to the guard-room; all the officers then go to their meal, except one in the hall, and one in the guard-room, who are relieved in turn.

From half to three quarters of an hour is allowed, when they are again, as above, marched to their work, and there remain till 12 o'clock; the signal is again given, they are again marched up on a line, and in the same manner marched into and around the hall, the same as at breakfast, with the exception of "service." Time allowed for dinner, one hour. At one o'clock they are again marched to their shops, and work till six P. M., when they again form a line in front of their buckets; when the word is given, "one pace in the rear, march," each convict steps one pace back, when

the officer having charge of each division commences searching, by passing his hands over the arms, body, and legs of the prisoner, and as each man is searched he steps to the front. When all are again in a line, the word is given to *uncover*, and each convict takes the cover from his night bucket; the officers pass and examine them; the words, *cover—right—up—forward*; and they march to the hall, attend prayers, and to their cells, as in the morning. The officer then in the hall lights up, examines each lock and door, recounts the convicts, and reports the number to the Warden or Deputy Warden. At half past 7 the signal is given, and each convict retires to his bed; the officer again examines the doors; sees that all are abed, and is then relieved by the Overseer, taking the first tour, which continues from half past 7 to 11 o'clock. He is then relieved by a Watchman, who takes what is called the middle tour, from 11 o'clock to half past 2; the Watchman taking the morning tour, or from half past 2 till light, relieves him. The above officers are required, while doing duty to be constantly on their feet, marching around the cells and upon the galleries to see that all is quiet and in good order. If any sickness or disorder takes place, he calls the watchman who acquaints the Warden or Deputy Warden who immediately repair to the hall, and take the necessary measures for relief of the sick or the suppression of disorder.

Duties of the subordinate officers.

Deputy Warden takes the principal charge of the internal affairs, under the direction of the Warden; spends the whole day in visiting the several shops and departments; sees that every officer performs his duty; attends to the wants and complaints of the convicts; and has a constant supervision of all the internal operations.

The Clerk assists the Warden in keeping the books and other writing; attends generally to the transportation of convicts from the county gaols; and when not thus engaged, performs such other duties as is required of him by the Warden or Deputy Warden.

The Overseers.—After performing the duty of marching the convicts as above described, to their shops, it is the duty of the Overseers to remain constantly in their shops and with their men. They are not allowed to sit down, but must not only remain on their feet, but also exercise the utmost vigilance in seeing that their men work diligently, in order and silence. In case of sickness or disobedience, they are required to send immediately for the Warden or his Deputy; they also report in writing, before nine o'clock, A. M., all who express a wish to see the Physician.

The Matron and her Assistant have the charge of the Female Department, of convicts. Those employed in the cooking are un-

locked by the Matron at 4 o'clock A. M., all seasons of the year, and are employed in cooking and washing, under the constant and immediate supervision and direction of the Matron, who attends personally to the weighing, measuring, and dividing of the daily rations. The Assistant Matron has charge of the work-room, where the females are employed in making and mending clothes for prison use, and in the manufacturing of palm-leaf hats, &c. After the labors of the day, they are assembled for religious service and instruction; immediately after which they return to their cells, and are locked in by the Matron.

The Watchmen are employed, *all the time*, in duty upon the walls, in the guard-room and hall, hospital, and in waiting upon spectators who visit the Prison; they are not allowed to sit, read or write, while upon any post of duty.

The Gate-keeper has the care of the gate leading into the yard, and takes charge of the out door hands and work.

The convicts have at all times free and unrestrained access to the Warden, and can, whenever they wish, see and converse with the Directors, or Director, when they visit the Prison. All punishments are inflicted by the Warden or his Deputy. No subordinate officer is allowed to leave the Prison, day or night, without permission of the Warden, or in his absence, the Deputy Warden.

The following is a Statement respecting the Convicts from official Documents.

Where born.	Where convicted.	Crimes.	Term of sentence.
Connecticut, 116	New Haven Co. 37	Burglary, 64	Life, 17
New-York, 18	New London " 24	Theft, 15 yrs. \$100 fine	7
Massachusetts, 19	Fairfield, " 38	Horse stealing, 10 " 500 "	1
Rhode Island, 11	Hartford, " 28	Attempt to kill, 10 " 100 "	1
Maine, 2	Litchfield, " 29	Arson, 4 " 50 "	1
New Jersey, 2	Tolland, " 10	Attempt rape, 2 " 100 "	1
Vermont, 2	Windham, " 11	Rape, 10 " 300 "	1
Delaware, 1	Middlesex, " 15	Breaking jail, 2 " 10 "	1
Virginia, 1		Manslaughter, 3 " 100 "	1
Pennsylvania, 3		Forgery, 3 " 50 "	1
Ireland, 8		Passing counter- 20 "	3
England, 3		feit money, 2 " 16 "	1
Canada, 1		Adultery, 11 " 15 "	5
Germany, 2		Robbery, 2 " 14 "	2
France, 2		Murder, 5 " 12 "	2
Isle of Maderia, 1		Bigamy, 1 " 10 "	2
		Attempt to mur- 9 "	7
		der, 10 " 8 "	9
		Stealing, 3 " 7 "	9
		Exposing child, 1 " 6 "	12
		Mayhem, 1 " 5 "	17
		Decoying child, 1 " 4 "	22
		Insanity, 1 " 3 "	28
		2 " 2 "	40
		2 " 6 months, 1 "	1
		1 " 6 " 2	2
		1 " 3 " 1	1
		1 " 2	2
		During insanity 1 "	1

It also appears that 76 of the whole number of males, have been married, and those 76 have 186 children, who unfortunately bear the odium of their fathers guilt. 125 confess that they almost daily used intoxicating drinks, and 38 could not read at all when they came into the prison,— most of them have since learned to read. The condition of the sick, and the instruction of the illiterate, are well attended to by the efficient physician and chaplain.

The following is considered as worthy of record from the notoriety of the characters described.

The first female convict ever sentenced to state prison in Connecticut, is *Thirza Mansfield*. She was convicted in New Haven, in 1825 of the crime of murder, and was sentenced to be hung, but the sentence was commuted to imprisonment for life at Newgate. She is now suffering her sentence in prison at Wethersfield.

Augustino Robello an insane Spaniard, is now enclosed in a cell for the crime of murder. The victim was a boy whom he hewed to pieces in a most barbarous manner while in a fit of passion. He was committed in 1836 for the term of his insanity, and he now lies on his cot a frightful spectacle—a wreck of man, bereft of reason.

Daniel Bennett, a native of Maine, is now in prison for the second offence—his first crime was Burglary, and his second was Burglary with intent to kill. He stabbed the officer Ripley, who took him, and in June of the present year, he attempted to kill an officer of the prison. This man is one of the most desperate fellows confined in the prison. He is now forty-six years of age, about six feet high and well proportioned. Twenty years since he was a convict in the New Hampshire prison, and has since been confined in Maine and Sing Sing prisons. While at Sing Sing, he attempted to excite an insurrection in that prison. With a stone axe in hand, he made a rush, with the cry of “Come on boys—liberty or death!” Captain Lyndes met him however, and soon quieted him. He made a violent attempt to escape while at the New Hampshire prison, but was met by the Warden on the top of the wall, and driven back. He also attempted to take the life of the Warden, with a large sledge hammer during his first term at Wethersfield. A permanent home will doubtless be assigned to him by the next court.

Harvey Griswold, a native of Suffield, was committed in January, 1828, for twelve years, on four indictments, for passing counterfeit money. In October, 1835, he stabbed the Warden of the prison, and was for that offence, sentenced for life,— he was however discharged from prison by an act of the Assembly in August,

1842. He appears to be a reformed man, and has visited his former friends and acquaintance, by whom he has been received with respect. His grandfather, Capt. Sylvanus Griswold, of Windsor, was formerly one of the most wealthy persons in the county of Hartford, — he owned by inheritance and purchase, *fifteen hundred acres* of valuable land in Connecticut, and his power and influence were very extensive.

John Sharp, of Milford, was committed in June, 1836,— his crime was murder, and his sentence for life. He is said to be one of the most notorious villains in the prison, and is now supposed to have murdered *four* or *five* persons before he was taken and convicted! His heart is made of stern stuff, or his mind must be harassed with horror, by the remembrance of his dreadful crimes!

No convict has ever escaped from this prison. Its safe construction and active vigilance of the officers, would seem to banish all hopes of escape and render every attempt worse than useless. A large portion of the time since the institution was established, it has been under the supervision of the present gentlemanly and prompt Warden, Amos Pilsbury, who seems well adapted both from experience and talent to discharge its duties. Strict order and discipline is apparent in every department, and yet it would seem to be without any vain show of authority — no bars and shackles are worn — no armed sentinel is seen except on the towers — no muskets, swords, or pistols are carried within the walls, and it is only in the guard room that any weapons of death are to be seen.

The *expense* of Newgate prison to the State, for seventeen years previous to the removal in September, 1827, including buildings, &c. erected, was more than \$125,000, being over \$7000 per annum, while the *profits* of the present institution for the same period have been more than \$92,000, being an average of over \$5,400 per annum. The true causes of this difference are obvious to those who are acquainted with the former and present management. The Boston Prison Discipline Society, have done much to correct prison defects, and reform abuses. They waded through the filth of many prisons in our country, noted their errors, and aroused the public to their base deformity, and the thanks of the nation are due for their faithfulness, ability, and zeal.

The spirit of improvement in prison discipline must now go forward, for the world have followed for ages the old system, and have proved it to be entirely useless, — convicts and keepers, and community at large, have long sought for, and demanded reformation. In some States, they have commendably improved; and now Connecticut advances forth, and with honorable pride, exhibits a *model penitentiary to the world!*





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